

VZCZCXYZ1693
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLB #0319/01 0631250
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 031250Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1166
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3154
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2501
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3722
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2008
RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA PRIORITY

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000319

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA - SOMERSET, NEA/PPD, R, INR/R/MR
INR-PARENT
SECDEF FOR OASD/PA
LONDON/POL
PARIS/POL

WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
USCENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: Lebanon: Media Reaction, March 3, 2008

Atmospherics:

Despite the uproar over the step taken by the U.S. Administration in deploying the U.S.S. Cole Destroyer and other ships in the eastern Mediterranean Sea off Lebanon, the Israeli "massacres" against Gaza "killing innocent people and babies" were given top billing in the Lebanese press. All media outlets expressed outrage over Israel's actions, with many emphasizing the "strange Arab and international silence" and the U.. "reluctance" to say anything.

On Saturday Marh 1, most media outlets reacted negatively to the deployment of the U.S.S. Cole. Pro-March 14 newspapers emphasized that the Lebanese Government did not know about this step, while Pro-March 8 newspapers seemed to feel that they were finally justified in accusing the Government of "conspiring" with the "American occupiers." Editorialists of all affiliations appeared convinced that the U.S. action was a "misguided" U.S. decision that will only lead to disastrous consequences for Lebanon.

Moderate, anti-Syrian An-Nahar commented that, "the message of the U.S. Destroyer U.S.S. Cole has changed into a visible internal crisis in Lebanon." Arab nationalist As-Safir observed that, "it will not be easy to erase the Lebanese fingerprints that participated in covering the decision to deploy the U.S. destroyer U.S.S. Cole...because such a dangerous decision cannot be taken by the U.S. without coordination with its allies including Lebanon." As-Safir added, "...In any case, the sudden change a week ago in the March 14 rhetoric, and the decision by a number of countries to evacuate their citizens prove that everyone knew about this step..."

Editorialists of all political affiliations were extremely harsh in their assessment of the U.S. decision, with some even characterizing it as "stupid." An editorialist close to Hizballah described Hizballah's "glee" over this "gift" by the U.S., and their considering U.S.S. Cole as proof that their conflict in Lebanon is with the American occupier and not a sectarian one.

Selected Headlines:

"Gaza's Blood in the Arabs' Necks" Pro-opposition Al-Akhbar (3/3)

"At Least 70 Dead as Israelis Run Wild in Gaza" English-language,
Beirut-based The Daily Star (3/3)

"Israel Adds Gaza To Its List of Its Historic Massacres" Arab
nationalist As-Safir (3/3)

"Berri Noted that (the American Naval Deployment) Is Addressed to
Gaza, Siniora Received 'Clarifications' and Hizballah Described it
as 'Military Interference': The American Naval Deployment: A
Regional Message With Nine Military Ships and Europe has been
Informed" Moderate, anti-Syrian An-Nahar (3/1)

Block Quotes:

"Bush's Peace," an editorial by Aouni Al'K'aaki in pro-Hariri
Ash-Sharq (3/3):

"Is this the peace that was promised to us by U.S. President Bush?
Didn't he say that before the end of his term there will be a
Palestinian state living side by side with Israel? Does peace kill
a Palestinian baby who was just born two days ago? How can we
believe Bush's words about this promised peace while Israel's
missiles are killing babies, and destroying houses? We might
understand that there is a conflict between the Israeli occupier and
the Palestinian people, ...but we do not understand the reason for
Israel's massacres ... The U.S. President did not even say one word
that expresses rejection of such acts. ..."

"Sending The Destroyer Escalates Internal Tension...", an editorial
by Rosana Bou-Monsef in moderate, anti-Syrian An-Nahar (3/1):

"The U.S. decision to deploy the U.S.S. Cole off the Lebanese Coast
has escalated tension in Lebanon. ...This development will be
easily used by the opposition to continue accusing the majority
(March 14) of conspiring with the Americans. ...Sources in the
majority did not hesitate to say that this development was not
helpful because it presented important trump cards to the
opposition...particularly since it deployed this U.S. destroyer at a
time when Israel is launching a war against the Palestinians in
Gaza..."

"Again," an editorial by Sateh Nouredine in Arab nationalist
As-Safir (3/1):

"Moving the U.S.S. Cole nearer to the Lebanese Coast is not only the
most dangerous decision that was taken by the Bush Administration to
support Lebanon, but also...the stupidest. ...This American step is
strangely naive and...will not even terrorize fishermen...but the
Lebanese will pay the price dearly...because no one in Lebanon will
wait for the U.S. navy, but different adversaries will kill each
other...The Americans are returning, open your bunkers."

"Response to 'Cole's Message: Terrestrial Rules are Different than
Rules in the Sea," an editorial by Imad Marmal in Arab nationalist
As-Safir (3/1):

"...When anyone in the Hizballah leadership is asked whether they
were terrorized by the U.S.S. Cole, they smile and say quickly:
'Cole' was sent to us by God's grace. Now, it has become clear that
the conflict is between us and the occupier. No one can give our
conflict with March 14 a sectarian stigma. ..."

Sison